

## **MEDIA & POL ORIENTATION – CHAPTER 5**

**PROF MICHAEL MORGAN, UNIV OF MASS/AMHERST**

**(Abstract:** role of media in building democracy, new technology, what television has done to the U.S. electoral process.)

PROFESSOR MICHAEL MORGAN: Like many of you here, I am deeply concerned about the world of media in both building and maintaining a democratic society because, depending on a wide variety of factors, media can either serve the cause of strengthening democracy or it can pose a very serious challenge to building a democratic foundation.

All political systems, all societies, have to struggle with the very difficult question of “what is the proper role, structure and function of mass communication?”

In some societies, media has been explicitly, consciously and intentionally used as an official instrument of the State to try and control public opinion, to try to stifle, to try to tell people what to think. But in a democratic system, at least in theory, the media is supposed to be free. Now this question is one of vital importance in South Africa where the entire system of broadcasting was revamped and completely transformed in the past 10 years. To an outsider like me it seems like a very significant effort to open up what was previously a closed system. However, political systems and media systems are very tightly intertwined in all countries because media institutions will reflect and help perpetuate the particular political and economic ideologies and structures of the society.

Our mainstream mythology in the US is that we are a free country politically and American citizens operate under the assumption that the media is also free. The concept of freedom is never really defined; nobody ever really says what it means, but people act as if they think they know what it means. In practice these presumed freedoms often result in intense concentration of media power and often a hidden monopolization of cultural production in the US. And they also contribute in some ways to the maintenance and the perpetuation of some social and global inequalities.

But they're often justified – at least in part. In western democracies, the whole concept of freedom of the press has traditionally been seen as a way to keep readers accountable to the people. The press is a conduit by which the people can know what the leaders are doing and a free press is supposed to provide a means for competing interests, divergent perspectives to be heard.

A free media is supposed to inform citizens and activate citizens and offer a wide variety of voices and views to help sustain the kind of political formality necessary for representative government. To let as many people as possible, as many groups as possible, tell their stories and to give citizens as much information as they can so people can make up their own minds and govern themselves. In a society where print media is strong and healthy, the press has traditionally done a very good job of cultivating and supporting many different publics, many different interests, increasingly those are part of markets rather than publics but I like to think of them as publics.

Print media can indeed foster a diversity of beliefs and perspectives and many people believe very firmly that the survival of democracy depends on this healthy diversity. When people are exposed to a broad range of views and when they can make up their own minds based on that information they can better govern

themselves, so goes the theory.

I want to argue that in the US this process has been seriously challenged by television. Most of our political assumptions about the media stem from a view of mass communications that is based on print and literacy involving traditional media but don't fully take television and new media into account. It is also not clear that these basic assumptions still hold in contemporary US where television is the main stream of the culture.

All kinds of amazing things have been happening in the past 10 years with media technology and the pace of development shows that it is accelerating. Every time we blink, technologies have changed again. The Internet and cell phones have changed our lives on a daily basis. What did we do before cell phones? What did we do before Internet?

And advances in computers and digital technology are affecting the way media content is produced. It's affecting the way it's distributed to all of us and it's affecting the way we consume it. This process of technological convergence is getting faster. It's all interwoven, computers, television, telephones, Internet – they're all intertwined. The hardware structures and the software patterns of the media are increasingly interwoven, interlocked and interdependent; and this has very significant implications about how media content is distributed and how we consume it. It's just amazing what we can do. I can go on the Internet here and I can record a program in my house on my digital video recorder. I can listen to the radio live in Argentina. I can make a phone call through my cable TV. I can use my cell phone to check my e-mails.

We're going to start getting television programs, not just things you call up but regular live broadcasts on our cell phones. We can walk around watching TV. With all the excitement about new technologies, it's very easy to forget. We get very distracted by the latest glitz. It's very easy to forget that people in the United States spend more time with television than with anything else. Television is still the most heavily consumed, pervasive source of common images, information and representations.

When most people think, especially political scientists and others, about media and political issues they tend to think about the news. They tend to think about public affairs, about editorials, and specifically about news types of programs. We think about media credibility; we think about objectivity, about the bias of journalists, whether or not the media is independent; and the discussion is usually focused on the press or on newspapers or on programs defined as news, and websites and media content that's political. And these old habits die very hard.

There are all kinds of very common and familiar concerns about the political effects of television in the US and they've been around for the past 50 years. There were many concerns that we've absorbed over the years and this has been the case since the earliest days of television in the US.

One very familiar concern dates back to the 1960 election when Richard Nixon lost because he didn't look good on television. He needed to shave. The conventional wisdom was that people who heard the debate between Kennedy and Nixon on radio thought Nixon won but people who watched it on television thought Kennedy won. I've never actually seen the research that demonstrates this but this is something you always hear. We also hear that the American public turned against the war in Vietnam, forcing Lyndon Johnson not to seek re-election because of how television presented the war. We often hear that Ronald Reagan was so popular because he was so good on TV – it's his acting skills, his experience in movies, he

knew how to look good on television.

These days the media is routinely blamed or praised for all the ebbs and flows in the popularity of leaders and their policies. Any politician who sees their popularity drop, it happens to most of them, will automatically blame the media. Media is always the easiest target for any politician.

Television has definitely transformed the electoral process in the US and the way we elect a President. Great efforts in the past few decades have gone into making the nominating conventions entertaining so they look good on television, but in the last few elections they have become more and more irrelevant because the conventions no longer nominate a candidate.

We know well in advance of the conventions the name of the candidate. So while the major television broadcast networks used to provide 3 or 4 days of almost continuous coverage of everything going on at the convention, in the last election, they provided a total of just a few hours throughout the entire week. It used to be 3 or 4 non-stop days of delegate speeches and podium speeches. Now, the networks couldn't be bothered to show very much of it because there's more money to be made in cop shows and reality shows than in political coverage. While television stations are licensed to serve the public interests and are legally required to serve the public interest, in practice, that plays less and less of a role. Since television needs exciting stories, we start the horserace of the campaign earlier and earlier.

It's 2005 and they are already starting to speculate about who's going to be the candidate in 2008. However, the coverage of campaigns is simply coverage about who's ahead and the campaign strategy. There is little discussion about issues, candidates, positions, and policies but just coverage about who is 2 points ahead or 3 points behind and what the polls show. That's the news, not what the candidates are saying.

Television is often blamed for weakening the traditional power of political parties. Whether or not television has actually diminished the formal role of parties, it certainly stepped in and replaced them as the primary means of communication between candidates and voters. The parties used to be the media in a sense candidates reach the people through the parties but now, candidates connect to the people through television. So instead of the party press of old when different parties had different newspapers or magazines to push their policies and platforms, we now have a relatively standardized market-driven, advertiser-sponsored system. We have a decline in party loyalty; fewer people now identify with the major political parties. The most important task of political parties today is to raise money to pay for television political advertising and to produce campaigns that look good on TV. Both candidates and parties therefore have to spend most of their time raising enormous amounts of money to pay for this advertising.

In 2004, the Kerry and Bush campaigns together spent \$600 million on advertising. That's 3 times what the candidates spent in the previous election in 2000 and recent studies have shown that people don't pay much attention to advertising since most have made their minds. Of course you can just change the minds of 2 or 3% and that's all you need to do, but most people don't follow the coverage very closely. Studies have shown that most people cannot identify which candidate goes with which position or which issue. They vote on who looks more presidential or whose wife doesn't have a funny accent! There are many reasons for this but it also reflects the fact that in the US television audiences are fragmented. They're splintered across many channels and it's harder than ever to get people's attention.

The need to raise enormous amounts of money makes candidates very

dependent on large donors, especially corporations. This is a very cosy system. It doesn't necessarily make for the best government but it certainly creates a system that is very resistant to change. That's one reason we are never going to be able to have any serious campaign finance reform.

Voting is another example. In a democratic society, voting in free elections is proclaimed to be the most basic and fundamental form of political action. Everybody gets to vote. This is how we declare, we behave, and participate. But while voters do turn out, the number of people who vote in the US since 1948 has been declining, although the last election was higher than usual.

There's a lot of reasons why turnout tends to be low. People who read newspapers are more active, more informed, and tend to vote. Heavy television viewers are less likely to vote and the margin is large, over 10%. When elections are won or lost by 1 or 2%, 10% makes a big difference. It's independent of age, income, education, sex, race and everything else.

Television alone is not the reason we have relatively low turnouts in elections but, in some ways television has turned elections into a private spectator sport where we sit back, watch it; and the only thing we have to do is tune in and see who won.

The media does its best to keep it exciting. It wants things to be exciting because they need people to watch. They're in the business of attracting viewers that advertisers want to reach and if they don't get enough viewers they don't make money. In another sense, mass communications may produce a dysfunction, news and information begins to act like a narcotic. You become hooked but the quantity of news and information that's out there is so overwhelming that people come to mistake the process of keeping informed. They mistake being somewhat informed for actually being informed. It makes us feel we're concerned and we're informed but doesn't leave any time or energy for actually engaging in any social action. And for other reasons television viewing can also promote a kind of alienation, complacency, passivity and apathy and also reduces political participation. When you bombard audiences with images of the good life and the benefits of consumption, it's more conducive to de-politicisation than to creating acquisition.

This might seem like a strange argument to make when I'm talking about how much information there is. We have all these news channels, 24-hour news channels, hundreds of channels giving us lots of information. However, these news channels, which are increasingly playing a role in the US, tend to reach very small but loyal and partisan audiences. They don't have high ratings, have some impact, get a lot of attention but draw relatively small audiences. Some of them, in fact, really don't present any news at all. They don't have reporters. They don't do investigations. It's just people giving their opinions masquerading this as news.

Of course, there is always concern about political manipulation of the news by people in power. This has been done by governments throughout history but it seems that in the last couple of years we've seen a lot more subtle and in some ways insidious direct political intrusion in the news. You may have heard that recently the US government paid a political commentator a few hundred thousand dollars to promote their education policy. They planted a fake reporter in a news conference to ask nice questions that were very easy to answer and they've been making a lot of what's called video news releases. Just as the press and other media take much of their news from press releases, the US government now creates video news releases, which are actually public relations pieces masquerading as news. They look like a news story; they sound like a news story; they feel like a news story. Local stations across the US will put them on the air because they're ready made, well produced and

they save the stations time and money. However, they're not news but public relations pieces produced by the government. According to the New York Times, at least 20 federal agencies, including the Defence Department and the Census Bureau, have made and distributed hundreds of these television news segments in the past 4 years and they are shown on local stations across the country almost always without any acknowledgement that the government produced them.

Now, at a larger level, this is just another form of invisible advertising called product placement. When characters in a film drink Coca Cola it's not because it happened to be there it's because Coca Cola paid thousands of dollars to have the character in the film drink Coca Cola. Product placement occurs hundreds of times a week on our television programs and these government videos are just another form of product placement.

These are the familiar common complaints that we hear about the media in politics. I'm going to argue differently that the implications of television for a democratic system go much deeper than simply questions of voting for candidates for elections. I'm going to argue that over the past 40 or 50 years television in the US has transformed political reality and the nature of that transformation has all gone almost unnoticed in part because we've been asking the wrong questions. If you get people to ask the wrong questions, you don't have to worry about the answers.

Most research done today about the impact of mass communications tends to focus on individual messages, individual programs, a series of specific newscasts or a type of genre. It usually looks at how a program, for example, may produce some immediate change in viewers, how it can change their minds about something, how it can make people do something differently, whether it's buy a kind of toothpaste or believe something different about something else.

Now one could say that we have a very balanced system because conservatives are always complaining about liberal bias in the media and liberals are always complaining about conservative bias. But most of that is because it assumes that the media have direct, simple, straightforward kind of stimuli that affects people's political views and positions. It's much more subtle and much more profound because it's not simply news and information that is the most significant source of people's political orientation, attitudes and opinions.

Think for a moment about the larger cultural process of story telling because I'm going to argue that the most critical implications of the media, the role of the media for democracy, do not simply revolve around news and journalism. The stories of a society, fiction, drama and what we usually think of as entertainment is where the implications of mass communications for democracy are really played. Stories play a very fundamental role in shaping our political orientation at a very basic fundamental level. They give us filters and frames within which we interpret and make sense out of political reality.

I have been studying the content and effects of television for over 30 years. It's called cultural indicators. We're trying to take broad indicators of currents in the culture with 3 main components to the research. First we look at the institutions that produce media messages. We look at how decisions are made in the media industry. What constraints there are, what pressures there are? How decisions are made to communicate one thing as opposed to something else?

Second, we do an annual monitoring, a content analysis, very elaborate, very statistical, very scientific, every year to find out and to track what are the most common and stable facts of life of the world of television drama. What is the world that exists, according to television drama? Who is in that world? What's the

demography? How many men and women are there? How many blacks and whites are there? How many rich and poor people are there? How does this world, the synthetic fictional world of television, compare to the real world?

We also look at programs to see how much violence there is. Who commits it, who is the victim, how often is it shown. We look at how many aspects of life are presented – everything from the family to education to household, romance, science, the environment, a broad range of aspects of life.

The third component we look at [is] how exposure to television shapes people's beliefs about social reality. What sort of images, perspectives, and assumptions do television viewing cultivate in audiences? We call this cultivation analysis.

Now the findings of this research show that television viewing does contribute in very subtle but profound ways to our political orientation. Here again, I'm talking not about news. I'm talking about regular stories, regular dramatic entertainment. The basic hypothesis underlying our research is that the more time somebody spends watching television, the more television dominates your sources of consciousness; the more television is your dominant source of cultural stories, the more likely someone is to have conceptions of reality that can be traced to the most stable and repetitive patterns in television drama.

For 30 years doing large samples and many systematic analyses, we found that television viewing makes an independent contribution to peoples' images about violence, sex roles, aging, occupations, education, science, health, religion and many other issues. In other words, there are many factors that affect how people see the world. People's attitudes and beliefs differ by education. They differ according to how old they are, where they live, social class, all kinds of sociological factors. We argue that television viewing is one of those factors, like social class or education.

To most people in the US and elsewhere, the concept of politics is a very narrow and precise term that refers to elections, campaigns and running for office, but I'm talking about politics in a larger sense. I'm talking about politics as it relates to the allocation and distribution of power and resources and what are the structures of society.

Most analyses about the media have to do with news coverage or campaign commercials and how these affect people. I know in a very close election you don't have to convince many people to have a very significant affect, but cultivation analysis is not concerned with the impact of a particular commercial or a particular debate. It's concerned with long-term accumulative general aggregate patterns of overall emerging ideas coming from the world of television.

We don't see television's effects in terms of change among individuals. It's not that people have an attitude one day and then they have a different attitude after they see a program or a commercial. It's the way in which television cultivates resistance to change in very slow shifts across generations. What cuts across programs, what is largely inescapable no matter what you watch, is what counts. If you focus on the plot and on the surface you can be distracted from what you are really absorbing.

The data from our studies does show that television cultivates specific underlying values and ideologies about social power in the US and these sometimes support but often pose a challenge to democratic principles. Television as it's organized in the US provides a relatively restricted set of views among an almost unlimited variety of interests among the public and these interests are often not represented on television. Unlike print media, television is viewed relatively non-

selectively.

Most people watch television by the clock not by the program. People don't watch programs; they watch television no matter what's on. Television doesn't require literacy, doesn't require mobility and it provides a steady stream of politically relevant messages to just about everyone whether they're looking for them or not. People who watch television are regularly confronted with a steady stream of politically relevant messages.

Today the number of channels has exploded. The average household in the US now gets over a 100 channels but more channels don't necessarily mean more diversity. We tend to think that because we have such a larger number of media outlets that we must have diversity. What we have instead is a lot of novelties and a lot of variations on a theme that has underlying similarities and consistencies below the surface. The number of channels is rising but the number of owners is shrinking and there's a tremendous concentration of media power brought about by deregulation.

We can have different channels that are targeted at different demographics, some at teenagers, some at the Latino audience, at women, or at people who play golf, and even small audiences may be very useful for marketing purposes. However, in terms of what most people watch is still concentrated on a fairly small number of channels. It shows very complimentary, consistent programming. To a very great extent, despite the diversity that's available in practice, more channels just means more of the same.

Like any other cultural artefact, like any other industrial product, television programs both reflect and are shaped by cultural assumptions or social values, often invisible because they are taken for granted. The ways in which decisions are made about casting who's the good guy, who's the bad guy, who's the victim, who's the hero, how is this person or that person is shown all reflect this.

These conventions that are followed, and the images of reality portrayed, teach very potent lessons that carry political and cultural significance for any culture. With any society, the stories about culture reflect and cultivate the most basic and fundamental assumptions, ideologies and values of a culture. Stories represent the way people see the world and when they tell the stories they socialize children and they remind adults over and over what the world is like.

Whether we're talking about myths, legends, fairytales, nursery rhymes, religious parables, fast food commercials, or soap operas, it doesn't matter that the function of stories is to acculturate children and to provide continuing socialization for adults. To remind people what exists or doesn't exist, what is important, what's good or what's bad, what's right, what's wrong. This is the cultural environment that we live in and it functions to remind us over and over again what we're not supposed to forget, what is supposed to be so invisible that we don't think about it.

Television is a centralized system of story telling. It brings a stable and coherent world of common images and messages into virtually every home in the US. Television has become the primary common source of everyday culture; it's not the most powerful influence on people by any means but it's the most common, the most pervasive, the most widely shared. It's the most common source of everyday culture, everyday politics and values of an otherwise extremely heterogeneous population.

Tens of millions of people who had been scattered and isolated provincially, culturally and politically, are now brought into the mainstream by television. The average household in the US watches television between 7 and 8 hours a day. By the time children finish high school they would have spent more time watching television

than at school. In fact, by the time they started 1<sup>st</sup> grade they had already spent more time watching television than they will spend in the classroom. By 1<sup>st</sup> grade they've spent more time watching television than they will spend in classrooms if they go to college. Along the way they will have seen about 18,000 violent deaths and they will have spent thousands of hours watching commercials. Adults spend more time watching television than doing anything except sleeping and working.

Now story telling in any culture relies upon repetition and television exposes us consistently to repetitive lessons. Children are born into a household where television is on 7 or 8 hours a day and, as George Burgner says, the stories of the culture are no longer told by people who have something to tell but by people who have something to sell. It's not parents, it's not the church, it's not teachers, it is now distant global corporations that create the cultural environment that our children are born into and grow up in even though the audience is fragmented across different channels.

Television is still a shared daily ritual for massive audiences and it doesn't matter how young or old you are, no matter how rich or poor, no matter where you live, television offers everybody the most broadly acceptable world of stories and actions. Every night, over a hundred million people will sit down and spend several hours watching almost the same programs, providing a cultural link among people. It's very similar to pre-industrial religion. According to George Burgner, television is like religion, except most people watch TV more religiously.

From the cultivation perspective, from the perspective of our research, everyday regular entertainment is a tremendously powerful means for expressing, sustaining and reproducing cultural beliefs and values. Most people most of the time watch dramatic fictional entertainment and that teaches us many lessons, many facts and values about political and social reality.

Everyday regular entertainment has very significant political ramifications because whatever genre or whatever channel or whatever type of show you are watching, the stories of television tell us over and over again what different types of people can do, what they should do, what fate has in store for them. The way television portrays crime, adventure, sex roles, minorities, courtrooms and the conflicts of urban life provides vivid and consistent lessons for viewers.

And these basic lessons are exposed to us day after day, week after week, month after month, year after year. This, in turn, contributes to very broadly shared common assumptions about risks, about opportunities, about vulnerability, about power and these are the building blocks of political orientations. These are the building blocks that shape and filter and frame the way we view political information.

For example, on television men represent independence, action and power and females stand for fun, home and games. Females are stalked and scared by villains and they are saved by heroes. A lot of the world of television, the formulas, the conventions, involves a very dangerous world of violence and power and this has changed very little over the past 30 years. 80% of programs feature violence, 60 % of the characters are involved in violence, breaking down to 5 or 6 acts of violence per hour. Crime is rampant and this involves about 60% of the major characters every week who protect us from crime and the other risks.

Law enforcement, policemen, attorneys, judges, doctors, health professionals are vastly over represented. There are many more doctors and lawyers and policemen on television than in reality and they're also over idealized. Life in the world of television is dangerous and risky but it's active and very affluent. Everyone is middle, upper middle class professionals and there must be some kind of happy



ending to put the audience in the right mood to be conducive to the commercial. Since advertisers do not want viewers to be upset when the commercial comes on, the story line will engage you but at the end there will be a happy ending to put you in the right mood to buy.

And these include some of the political messages of what we call entertainment. The specific power relationships that are repetitively shown in television drama do help maintain the positions of various groups in the real world, the power structure. Just take the example of violence. Violence on television is not equally distributed; some groups on television are shown as more powerful. Some groups are shown as more likely to be victims.

So we look at many different groups, social groups, demographic groups on television programs, and we count up. For example, how many times did this person commit violence? How many times were they a victim? And we see very consistent patterns. We see that white middle class males are the most powerful when you compare the ratio of how much violence they inflict compared to how much they suffer. Women are more likely to be shown as victims than to commit violence. Older people are more likely to be shown as victims. Non-whites are more likely to be shown as victims. It's not like the writers get together and they decide to do this, it is completely unconscious; it's a convention of storytellers. Of course no story needs to represent reality, all stories are biased; all stories are fiction. However the question remains as to what the direction of the distortion is and what are the consequences? We therefore look at television violence as a demonstration of social power not of reality but of ideology. It maintains a sense of a power of hierarchy of who is the most important, who can do what against whom, and who is the victim. It is not very overt. You have to do a lot of counting to see this but it is very consistent. Year in and year out across all genres, there are very consistent messages about who has power and who doesn't. People who spend more time living in the world of television absorb these messages and they apply them to the real world in ways that have direct political significance.

For one thing heavy television viewers over estimate their chances of being a victim of violence. The most common concern always has been that television violence contributes to violence in society and makes people more aggressive.

However, that may happen to a very small number of people, but there are one hundred million people sitting down and watching television every night in the US and they don't go out and shoot their neighbours. If the imitation of violence was wide spread, we wouldn't need research since we would all be dead.

Once in a while you may get these cases of imitation that get a lot of media attention, but that's the exception. We do know that the more people watch television, the more violence they think is in society and the more mistrustful, the more anxious, the more suspicious, the more apprehensive they become. This is called the mean world syndrome.

There are institutional and economic pressures in the television systems that have been remarkably stable and consistent over time. Despite the surface level novelty, you know this year it is cop shows, next year its doctor shows, etc. There are novelties and thugs that come and go but the underlying economic structure doesn't change, tens of millions of dollars ride on keeping the audience happy.

Last year advertisers spent \$50 billion advertising on television and with so much money at stake, people who produce programs have to create programs that have a broad appeal. This means trying to upset the smallest number of people, avoiding political or other extremes and making things as non-threatening as possible.

Glorifying conventional consumer values, striving towards respectable middle of the road and balanced subjects is the norm. It's always been television's strategy to avoid extremes because the broadcast networks and the advertisers are attacked by special interest groups on both the left and the right. Whatever television does, both the left and the right attack it, so what the program producers and the networks are most afraid of is that people will get too upset or too angry or too frustrated with what they are watching and turn it off. The worst thing that can happen is that television loses viewers.

Therefore, the industry takes the obvious way out by trying to navigate between the extremes, staying in that safe comfortable mainstream that doesn't alienate anybody and that can attract the largest possible audience, especially if that audience is between 18 and 49 since they spend the most money.

So groups that are defined as deviant or extreme are very rarely shown. They rarely get airtime or they are harshly criticized since all presentations have to appear objective. There's this great myth of balance, objectivity and neutrality but in reality it's catering to the mass market for mass marketing purposes.

Since some people are to the left of this television mainstream and some people are to the right, television, in order to maximize their audiences, steer a middle course to absorb and homogenize people that otherwise have divergent perspectives. There's a kind of convergence from the left and from the right into this mainstream, called mainstreaming, the convergence of different groups towards the dominant ideology.

When you ask people in the US to place themselves on a political scale, we have a fairly simplified continuum we use. We have a liberal to moderate to conservative, to sort of leftist, sort of moderate, sort of rightist; and it's pretty one dimensional most of the time in common discourse. When we ask people: are you liberal or moderate or conservative, we have discovered that people who watch more television are less likely to say they're liberal, they're less likely to say they're conservative. They're more likely to say they are moderate, in the mainstream. The more time people spend watching television, based on surveys of thousands of people we compared, the less they say they're either liberal or conservative.

The images of political reality that we get are pretty highly constricted both in entertainment and the news because we have a fairly narrow continuum and positions that are outside the narrow range of political discourse essentially don't exist. But every issue is presented as having a liberal side and a conservative side, whether we talking about abortion, taxes, homosexuality, school prayer, gun control, racial equality, women's rights, prayer in school, or the death penalty. However, there's the sense that the truth is somewhere in between, somewhere in the mainstream. The more that people watch television the more they place themselves in that general safe middle moderate position.

This is extremely interesting when you look at groups that define themselves by party affiliation. What television does is to blur and distort the impact of parties. Whether people are Democrats or Republicans, both identify themselves as moderate if they watch lots of television. If they watch less television, liberals or Democrats say they're liberal, Republicans say they conservative and if they watch more television, they all say they're moderate, a consistent finding over the years.

In sub-root after sub-root, we look at older people, younger people, blacks, Latino's, white's, the less educated, the more educated and it's specific to television. It doesn't happen with newspapers. It doesn't happen with radio. It doesn't happen to other types of media. The same results do not apply to media in general. It's

television and television alone that cultivates this kind of moderate self perception in audiences that is very much in line with the mainstream political lessons of television.

This may be part of a more general phenomenon, this cultivation of more homogeneous average self-perceptions. It's not just political moderation. We also find that television is dominated by middle class characters and upper middle class characters. Everybody's affluent, well off, very comfortable and we find that people who watch more television are more likely to say they are middle class, regardless of their actual income.

We also look at people who objectively are working class, who have low income, but if they watch more television, they identify themselves as middle class. If you look at people who have higher income and are well educated, they, too, identify themselves as middle class if they are heavy television viewers. Light viewers on the other hand will more realistically identify with their actual income or class position.

Therefore, television tends to blur class distinctions just as it blurs political labels. Cumulative exposure to television confuses real class distinctions and it cultivates average middle class self perceptions.

On the surface, it would appear that mainstreaming is some sort of middling phenomenon and it's not. The mainstream is not in fact the middle of the road. If we look at the actual positions that heavy television viewers take on specific political issues, we see that the mainstream tilts in different directions depending on the topic.

When we look, for example, at the hard political issues that we struggle with, such as minority rights, women's rights, fairness, defence spending, welfare, or taxes, they show very interesting differences when you look at television viewing. And again, on all these issues television represents the most common stable and repetitive stories but the patterns are different for different groups. Cultivation and mainstreaming depends on where groups are in relation to these.

What we find is that on all these social issues we have a broad range of views among people who don't watch much television. Liberals tend to have liberal attitudes and conservatives have conservative attitudes. Among heavy viewers, however, this is blurred and it turns into homogenising views in the direction of the mainstream, a more conservative viewpoint. For heavy viewers, differences are much smaller and political ideology does not really differentiate their attitudes. On issue after issue, light viewers are more diverse but heavy viewers are more concentrated; and liberals, moderates and conservatives converge on the conservative position no matter what the issue.

The most notable trend on social issues when you look at the amount of television viewing among liberals, moderates and conservatives is erosion, a weakening of what is traditionally the progressive or liberal view among heavy viewers. Heavy viewers who call themselves liberal have conservative positions on social issues. Those who call themselves conservative are already in the mainstream, both light and heavy viewers have conservative attitudes. Liberals or those who call themselves liberals only have liberal views if they don't watch much television. People who call themselves liberal and watch more television have the same views as conservatives on social issues.

Therefore, mainstreaming doesn't just mean a convergence of political differences but it means a very systematic steady significant shift towards a conservative direction. Most particularly, it reveals a significant loss of support for personal liberties, for personal and political freedoms among people that call themselves liberals. However, something entirely different appears in the data when

we look at economic issues. When you look at economic issues it's very different.

When you look at issues of government spending or issues like crime, education, health or defence spending, the results are entirely different. Heavy viewing conservatives and moderates converge towards the liberal position of wanting the government to spend more while traditionally the conservative position is that the government should spend less. The more people watch television, the less they say the government is spending too much. Even though they want the government to spend more on health, education or crime, for example, they do want government to function as a mechanism of social control. When you get people scared, it's easier to get them to accept exceptional measures and curtailment of individual liberties if they think it will make them more secure.

Heavy viewers are more apathetic but so afraid of crime in the streets and terrorism that a recent study indicated that heavy viewers explicitly support curtailing civil liberties to deal with these issues. They support expanded powers for the police; they are more accepting of limits on privacy and more willing to accept restrictions on freedom of information.

And again I'm not talking about news; I'm talking about entertainment. They want more protection; they want more money for fighting crime and drug abuse, more money for defence and again lower taxes. Heavy viewers of all political persuasions, liberals, moderates, and conservatives hold these conflicting views more than light viewers do. What this means overall is that television is contributing to the current political scene in the US in three ways.

First is a blurring of the impact of traditional party lines and traditional class lines, differences by regions and other types of differences. Among white viewers, factors such as whether you call yourself liberal or moderate or conservative or your social class or your age or your education or what region of the country you live in matters a lot.

People living in the Northeast, the South, the Midwest or the West have very different attitudes on political and social issues. A bit more liberal on the coasts, more conservative elsewhere; and those differences are very strong among people that don't watch much television. But among people who watch a lot of television, the effect of where they live is reduced; they converge into that mainstream. All those factors of age, education, or region play a much smaller role for people that watch a lot of television. If you live in the cultural and political mainstream of television, it appears that there is a weakening of the social forces that have traditionally governed political behaviour that most political scientist look at.

Second, television will blend those otherwise diverse perspectives and ways of identifying yourself into the mainstream. Heavy viewers of all groups are more likely to call themselves moderate and middle class and less likely to define themselves as being out of that mainstream.

Third and very significantly, television bends the mainstream to the purposes of its commercial advertising interests. Heavy viewers are conservative on social issues but very liberal on economic issues, creating very striking political paradoxes. Heavy viewers think like conservatives, want like liberals, and call themselves moderate, an interesting combination. They're less likely to vote; they think elected officials don't really care what happens to people like them but they're much more interested in the personal lives of politicians than in their politics. They're much more interested in knowing what they had for breakfast or what their kids are like or what they do on their vacation than in politics.

They want to cut taxes but they want to improve education. They want to

improve medical care and they want to save the environment but buy SUV's that are more powerful and less fuel efficient than ever. They have tremendous distrust of government but they want it to fix things for them. They want the government to protect them at home and from foreign threats. They support and have great respect for freedom but they want to restrict people who might use it in an unconventional way. Freedom is great as long as you don't go too far with it.

Television cultivates this combination of a fear of insecurity and weaker support for civil liberties, freedom of speech, freedom of the press, greater suspicion of minorities and foreigners. It also cultivates very traditional ideas about gender roles and in general we find more inflexible authoritarian ways of thinking. Heavy viewers support strong government action to protect them and they think people are better off if they do what they're told to do.

Now these are all unintended, incidental effects of television. There's no conspiracy. It's not like the government and the networks get together and decide to do this. It's a side effect of the kind of systems that we have. Even though they're unintentional, they do not create the kind of cultural sphere that is not necessarily conducive to solidifying democratic principles and practices and that's why I say the messages and the stories of television pose a challenge to democratic principles and practices.

Many people may think that democracy works best when people don't really care a lot about politics but are deeply concerned about things like hairspray and deodorants and how fast their cars go. Some people think that democracy works really well the less people actively try to get involved because the more conflicts you have, the messier it is, and then nothing really gets done. But the concept of democracy as it's usually described implies that citizens can participate in their own governments on the basis of equality and many studies show that even the youngest Americans learn these values at a very early age. We value very highly the principle of popular government. We value the act of voting. We value pluralism. We put great emphasis on saying we support equality of opportunity, pluralism and rights for everybody.

But television, not by design, not by conspiracy, but by virtue of the side effects of its completely commercial structure, tends to work against these principles in practice. The irony is that television probably strengthens support for the principles of freedom ideologically while at the same time, in practice, undermines them at a deeper level.

Again, these are not effects of the technology of television *per se* but are consequences of the very specific, very particular institutional economic commercial arrangements that have made television the mainstream of American culture, keeping access mostly limited and increasingly smaller number of corporations that control the media. Again, television is not by any means the most powerful effect on people. Television's effects, statistically speaking, are small but they're steady and stable and when you have a drip, drip, drip over time, it can become a tidal wave. Elections are won or lost by one or two points. If you have a global temperature change of one or two degrees you know what can happen.

So it's not statistically large but it's common, it's pervasive and it's very steady. It standardizes the cultural currents in ways that cultivate not this change, not this transformation, but resistance to change and this becomes a remarkably effective mechanism of social control. One example is gender. Year in and year out, no matter what type of program we're talking about, there are three men for every woman on television. In the world of television we say men count three times as much as

women. When women are portrayed, they're primarily defined in terms of romance, home and family except in instances of children's programs or in the news. In children's programs and the news there are five men for every woman.

Eighty percent of female characters, in regular entertainment, can also be identified in terms of their marital status. Their marital status is an intrinsic necessary component of the way females are represented. We can correctly code it 80% of the time while for the marital status of men we only know 40% of the time.

Consequently, we find that heavy television viewers are more likely to support and endorse traditional gender roles. They are more likely to believe that families are better off if the man works and the woman stays home taking care of the children. Women are happiest raising a family and staying home.

Now in the real world the number of people that hold traditional gender roles has been dropping rather dramatically. The last 30 years in the US has seen tremendous advance both in reality and in peoples' attitudes. There's still a long way to go but there's been a lot of progress made compared to where we were in the 50's and 60's.

But even though the number of people that hold traditional conservative gender attitudes has dropped, heavy viewers are still more likely than light viewers to endorse traditional roles even though the overall number is decreasing. So whereas before it might have been 70% now it's like 30%, we can still say television functions as a mechanism of cultural resistance. It can't get too far ahead but it can't get too far behind either. I'm not saying that television alone has been the major obstacle towards progress of social equality but it might have been happening more rapidly without this continual cultivation of traditional images.

A democratic society will require communication for stability, for growth, for survival in a large and complex society. Democracy depends on mass communication, to tell us things that we need to know in a relatively objective and comprehensive way because in a large and complex society it's almost impossible to find out things for ourselves without media. Enormous portions of what we know or what we think we know is not based on direct experience. It's not based on what we see or what we learn directly, it's based on mediated representations. And, therefore, we need mass media to tell us certain things.

We also need to find some way to make television more responsive to interests that it doesn't serve very well right now. We need to find some way to make television more responsive to rewards besides simply commercial profit. I am not saying that we shouldn't have any commercial television. I'm saying it's a problem when you have nothing but commercial television because in a commercial system the private corporate interests don't automatically give way to the public interest. There's a paradox and an irony in this situation.

The media are private corporations but they are licensed to serve the public interest – that's an intrinsic paradox. When we have concentration of ownership in fewer and fewer hands, the need to attract the largest possible audiences can lead to less diverse content and can lead to the neglect of audiences that advertisers don't want to reach. This means that programming is more and more only created for those audiences that advertisers want to reach. If you are a member of an audience that advertisers don't care about, then you don't get programming. When it's nothing but ratings and commercial profit, the result can be more apathetic and alienated people who, never the less, remain obedient to the authority of the market place.

The biggest change in television around the world in the last fifteen years has been the transformation from a very strict state control to private commercial

networks. In countries in Latin America and Eastern Europe, television systems that were under extremely rigid state control were privatized. Other countries that traditionally had more public service television models have often been overwhelmed and drowned out by the rise of commercial channels. That's happened often in Western Europe. They found it difficult to maintain public service broadcasting due to the onslaught of cable and satellite commercial channels. In most places I studied, especially in Argentina and Hungary, democratisation raised the question about what to do with media. They tossed out the military dictatorship or the authoritarian communist government for democratic governments but didn't know what to do with the state-owned channels. The debate was between two choices: Should the state keep control or should media be privatized? Nobody could think of any other alternatives.

We are all very familiar with the problem of state-run media. The question and the heart of the debate is whether or not a completely private advertiser supported system is the best way to serve the public interest? Wouldn't it be nice to explore some other possibilities? Could a nation have a few channels that really are public, truly public, not controlled by the government, not controlled by the ruling party and not controlled by private business?

In the US we cannot conceive of a media system that isn't essentially private and controlled by advertising. Just because it's not directly run by the government we define that as democratic because we also support capitalism and democracy. We think if it's capitalist commercial media then by definition it's democratic. And that's what is interesting to me about the system here because, while imperfect, it seems that it's in some way structurally on the right track because it's mixed. It's supported by a combination of license fees and advertising and it's intended to be pluralistic, to serve a range of interests.

You can debate about its success or failure but you can see that it is a work in progress. You can have the debate about what kind of media system you want and whether it's working. We can't have that debate because for us the media is fixed. We take it for granted. The notion of changing the media, of the public changing the media, of political interests changing the way the media are structured – is outside of what we can possibly conceptualize.

It's a very delicate balancing act. The media has to be independent of government. The role of government in a democratic system is to make sure that the media provides space for different voices and different interests, not just one group whether or not its government or giant corporations.

There is a great deal at stake here because the institutionalization of a democratic system that provides a wide and diverse range of voices is vital for the protection of human rights. A diverse media system is absolutely fundamental to the protection of human rights but it's not simply a question of government control versus private commercial media because the more a government controls the media the more the government strictly regulates the media and uses it for its own propaganda, the less people believe it. The less credibility it has, the more people discount it. Total government control of the media didn't stop the revolutions in Eastern Europe, didn't stop the fall of the Soviet Union. The military government in Argentina was overthrown when it controlled the media and strict government censorship certainly didn't keep the National Party empowered here. Simply controlling the media does not guarantee that a government will stay in power.

In contrast, media can quite effectively function as a form of social control to maintain the status quo, protecting and maintaining the existing political, social, and

economic structures when people think they're free, when they're perceived as being independent. When they mainly provide messages in the form of entertainment and when that entertainment is seen as having no political purpose, when it's all seen as just entertainment, then that's when the stories of television or any dominant media can have its most significant political consequences.

The commercial market place can be just as effective as the state when it comes to closing off alternative voices, when it comes to narrowing the range of acceptable views in favor of the safe, the standardized and the profitable. The difference is that in a private commercially supported system, as any happy television viewer will tell you in the US, it's all just entertainment. Thank you very much.

### **Reflection by Henry Jeffreys, Senior Editor, Beeldt**

HENRY JEFFREYS: Thank you very much and good morning. As I walked in, someone called me Professor and I think I need to set that record straight. I am not a Professor but just a simple working journalist; but issues of the media and how that affects the way in which we help to strengthen and build democracy in South Africa and develop our society are really dear to me, and when I received the Neiman Fellowship at Harvard last year I went to the US with a lot of anticipation about understanding the American media, particularly in the journalistic media.

Before going to the US, I traveled to the US often, but this was my first visit to the US post 9/11 and we had big debates here as others did around the world about how the US and particularly the US media have changed since that terrible day on September 11<sup>th</sup>.

I was very keen to be on a university campus where I could not only consume the American media, but also engage with peers from that country on what has happened. It was quite a revealing experience so I am not going to deal in a direct way with Professor Morgan's presentation this morning, although I can say that listening to him, I put myself back in Cambridge, especially the bit about the way in which US television influences the way in which Americans live and think.

I think during the elections last year you probably heard people talking about "so called" red States and "so called" blue States. Now Cambridge, and Boston next door, are probably at the heart of blue state America, so I am not going to suggest that my experiences in Cambridge were in any way part of how I experienced mainstream America, but it was very revealing. And for a media and political junkie like me, going to the United States in an election year, post 9/11, and observing how the Americans are reacting to this event, are consumed by it, was really most valuable.

I knew that 9/11 changed America. We hear that every day, but living in the US, watching and observing the media, engaging with ordinary Americans, you become acutely aware of how that day has changed America and why it is very important that those of us in the rest of the world should try and understand these changes and how they can, in fact, affect us.

America is the world's only super power. When it demonstrates its military might it is an awesome sight. We see that on our television screens every day and the way in which America is now operating in the world is, in fact, very crucial to the way in which our own future is going to be determined, and our view of this situation comes from the way American events are presented to us by the American media.

Now, our own experiences of American culture or American life are largely cultural. When you talk about America, you talk about what you've seen on "Jerry



Seinfeld". You talk about what you've seen on "The Chief". You talk about what you've seen on the latest American soap opera that you might be following or the latest American movie or the latest American book that you have read.

Our own understanding of American life, the American psyche, comes to us via the way in which the American media portrays life in America and this is a very confident media, and I refer here to media in the broader sense of the term, including the books, the movies, the television. We don't get much American radio except for a boring Voice of America but radio in America, from my own observations, has emerged as a very powerful tool within the United States that is central to the way in which we think about the US. I think the political landscape in America is about to be so changed that it will have an impact on ordinary US citizens, on the body politic, and, very important for us, on the nature of the media. It has been quite exciting and at times quite scary to have watched this happen.

We were in the US in an election year and there was a point during the election campaign that people felt John Kerry, the Democratic candidate against George W Bush, had a real chance to pull off an upset. Bush at that stage was virtually untouchable and I think that had to do with the way in which the Conservatives, the Republicans, captured the 9/11 moment for themselves and really managed to get the media in a position where any criticism of what came out of the White House, any criticism of Bush's handling of the post 9/11 situation and then following on that, the decision to go to war in Iraq in the face of dubious evidence was considered unpatriotic.

There was plenty of evidence not only put forward by the media but evidence from official investigations that the whole story about weapons of mass destruction in the hands of Saddam Hussein had been fabricated or exaggerated. However, in the face of all the information that flowed to the American people, they continued to have faith in the conduct of the war by George Bush and I would make the point that this was largely due to the way in which the media, like a rabbit caught in the headlights of an oncoming car, failed in its duty to the American people due in no small part to the way the White House handled communications. If you criticized Bush, you were criticizing what happened on 9/11 and that for me was quite fascinating.

Can I briefly just say something about the Neiman Fellowship? It's basically a fellowship for twelve international journalists from around the world and twelve American journalists. We gather in Cambridge at Lipman House when we are not going to classes of our choice at Harvard and largely sit around tables like this to debate the issues of the day and the big issue we debated was the conduct of the media post 9/11.

The conduct of the media in performing its main function in respect to the war in Iraq resulted in quite a lot of initial ugly tension between the internationals because we had the perspective that an imperialistic United States was trying, through the war in Iraq, to conquer the world, and our American colleagues who obviously disagreed, resulting in debates about the state of the media in the United States and whether it was fulfilling its prime function to keep the American people informed.

The other thing that you became aware of, and this is something that as the international participants in the program we did not fully understand, was the belief that liberals had a strangle hold on the media, a debate still raging. In fact, over the past decade or so, certainly since Bush came to office and certainly post 9/11, the conservatives have hit back in a big way and the influence of conservatives in the American media is increasing.

There is a very famous conservative American media personality names Rush

Limbaugh. He has come from nowhere and has built a radio talk show empire as we say in Afrikaans '*Dit skrik vir niks*'. It really is a huge thing and as I was driving from Arkansas down to Florida over two days, I tuned into his program. You could just sense and feel the power of Limbaugh and he unashamedly pushes a conservative agenda.

During the last election, political action committees for both Bush and Kerry began using media, not what we would call the mainstream, the traditional print papers, the evening news on ABC, CBS and NBC but a new phenomenon called the Blogosphere that is an internet-based method that opinionated people use to get their views on the internet to bypass the mainstream media. Blogs have in the past two or three years emerged as an alternative platform or channel through which Americans get their information and it is amazing to see how they are shifting opinions of ordinary folk on a day to day basis.

There is now open warfare between liberal and conservative media players and my own view, the conservatives are on the ascendancy. The mainstream media also is suffering quite serious credibility problems, much of their own making. On the one hand their trepid response to the way the White House has been managing the news since 9/11, but secondly, there has been lots of upheaval internally in the admired liberal press. The New York Times had the Jason Blair issue. Jason Blair was a Times journalist who sat in hotel rooms just down the street from his office and fabricated stories for almost a year, writing from all parts of the United States without ever having been there. It was a huge media scandal that reverberated even here, because we had our own problems with plagiarism not so long ago. This was not even plagiarism but fabricating the news, presenting it to a newspaper that proclaims to be the world's best newspaper and all of those experienced editors didn't catch on until it was too late.

There was a Dan Rather affair on George Bush's military record where they ran with a source who told them things about Bush's military record. In fact, on the eve of the election when they ran the story, it turned out not to be true and they had to retract the story. Dan Rather as a result, one of the most admired television journalists in America, had to retire.

Add to this the media's coverage of the weapons of mass destruction and the evidence presented by people like Colin Powell at the United Nations that turned out to be fabrications. As a result, the mainstream media who's function in the past has always been to take nothing for granted simply because the government says its so, lost its credibility and this is a lesson that we in this country need to learn.

It's not our function to just believe it because the government says so, but these papers had a track record. These are the people who brought down Richard Nixon, a President in the White House, because of their investigative powers and the professional way in which they handled it. They took in all the information as it flowed out of the White House and they presented it to the American people. Since they had published the nonsense about weapons of mass destruction in Iraq, they had to run apologies for having failed in their duty to properly inform.

Such internal scandals in the so-called mainstream media presented itself as '*manna from heaven*' to the people on the blogs and to the conservative movement that are trying to say the days of the liberal stranglehold is over and that you just can no longer trust the liberal media. Look at all these self-inflicted scandals that they have gotten themselves embroiled in and I think this also leads to another thing that worries a person like me who looks at the American media with a large dose of admiration.

It emboldens I think the government in South Africa. These days we would be appalled to hear that a journalist has been jailed for not wanting to reveal sources. Today there is a journalist of the New York Times who spoke to someone confidentially, didn't write a story about it but the government still wanted to know the name of her source. She went through the proper court system but the courts in the US found her guilty and she is spending the six months in jail for a story that she never even wrote. She spoke with someone on the phone, the prosecutor said, "I want to know what that person said to you," and the person is in jail.

The other thing that interested me while I was there is the whole issue of media ownership. Who owns the media and the fact that the media is owned by the private sector, does that necessarily make it a Democratic media? Does it make it an open media? These are huge corporations that are part of the whole corporate body politic in America and I'm under the impression that ownership of the media since 9/11, and especially since the war in Iraq that there are issues for the American media to really consider about how this corporate ownership of media in America ties in with the way in which the news agenda is being set in the US. General Motors, as an example, one of the largest corporations in the United States, owns NBC Television and at the same time supplies military equipment to the US Military and that really for me looks like a very problematic relationship. I think there are issues there that seriously need to be re-visited when it comes to this issue of ownership.

It also emboldens the government. When I left Cambridge, there was a big debate about how the White House was trying to change the very nature of how public radio and public television is being managed and is being governed. There was this debate that liberals actually influence the way in which public radio and public television functions and how the news agendas in those institutions are being set; and the conservatives want at least a 50/50 balance in the way in which issues are covered. This battle now into the sphere of public radio and public television will be very interesting to watch.

News as entertainment is another thing that struck me. One of my favorite programs, and due simply because I got so upset with the limited information that flowed from the traditional television news channels, is hosted by Jon Stewart. Jay Leno you might see here, those of you who watch DSTV. There is also Conan O'Brien and Dave Letterman. These guys are comedians, but it was surprising to me how during the course of the election campaign big new stories broke on these late night shows, especially on John Stewart's show. On one program he made a point that I think should really have the media operators in the US very worried. He was on a television program and he made the point that people now turn to him to get the real news, something that the mainstream media should think very hard about. Then there is the emergence of the documentary programs like Fahrenheit 9/11, billed as films, where people make documentaries that have a left agenda and then the right hit back by making their own documentaries, bringing the liberal versus conservative battle into US theatres.

There is a lot that the US has to offer the world and that's to be admired, but that's also a lot to be very scared about. What is very disappointing for me is that this is a country that dominates the world in virtually every sphere of life and yet the way in which the media for the internal US audiences portray the outside world is virtually non-existent. You need a tsunami to happen and then it's amazing to watch this machine spring into action, it is really incredible.

The coverage by the American media of the tsunami was something to behold and that demonstrated the power of the media. While the government was very slow

in responding about what to do, ordinary Americans, once these pictures started flowing into their living rooms, responded by putting their dollars where their hearts were. They raised enormous sums of money to help and the credit must go to the American media.

You know the situation with Dafur in Sudan. As soon as Colin Powell called the situation in Dafur “a genocide”, the media began covering the tragedy there. We always expect that when CNN’s Christiana Ammanpoer (sic) arrives in a country then lots of people are going to die. That’s what is said, cynically, because that’s the type of stories that she follows. However, what I’ve learned watching this from up close is that when she arrives in a country, yes, many people are dying and have been dying for a while, but then that’s the way in which the world gets to know about it and that’s the power of the American media.

Other than that, it takes a disaster, a tragedy for the world to make its way into American living rooms. Nothing in Africa except for Dafur, except for the famine in Zaire, features. I participated in three or four television programs where this issue was discussed and the simple answer is that you put the images of Africa into American living rooms and they switch off. They go look for Jay Leno or mainstream news programs. Television news programs hardly ever touch on anything from our continent and I want to, in conclusion, ask what are we to do about this?

Again, I think it is very important that we understand the full extent of how the American media influences the way in which Americans think about the world. The way in which they think about our continent and our people, sometimes in a stereotypical way, is because the American and European media, have got a virtual monopoly on how we are portrayed to the world. We need to break this down and we’ve started doing this. Three years ago here in South Africa, we had the All Africa Editor’s Conference where we brought African editors from around the continent; about 33 countries were represented, where we discussed this issue. Coming back from the United States, I am now even more convinced that is necessary that we build the capacity for us to tell the African story. Not through rose tinted glasses but to tell it in the way in which we as Africans are experiencing it and to tell it not only to Africans but also to the world.

We formed out of that conference an organization called the African Editor’s Forum. It will be launched in Johannesburg in October and we are very excited about it. At this launch will be a conference on reporting the African story and all the main players that really control the way in which Africans are represented in the minds of people in the United States and Europe are being invited. CNN, the BBC and all the large media organizations around the world are coming to Johannesburg and we are going to discuss with them the way in which Africa is covered in the United States and elsewhere and how we can start telling our own story.

Finally, just one point about South Africa: You can’t compare us to the United States but in relation to Africa we have a highly developed open media. Our media companies are also corporations like General Motors and others, and they’ve set their sights on the rest of the continent. They see the rest of the continent as new markets and I think there are very important lessons on how we proceed with this. I think it is necessary that South Africa play its role to help build this media capacity that I refer to on the continent. But we should really avoid the pit falls. I think how to avoid them is for us to study much more closely the American media as I have come to know within the past year.

### **Question and answer session**

QUESTION: How does the media affect the practice of foreign policy?

HENRY JEFFREYS: I think in the mindset of the American media there definitely is something that you might want to call the American way of life and I think that if you experience it in movies, in magazines, whether they are for entertainment purposes, for news purposes, etc. I think that is sort of the physiological launch pad of the way in which they do things in America and that's the right way and the way in which journalists do their work, the way in which entertainers entertain etc. is to inform by buying into what I call the American way of life. I think we're seeking the South African way of life. I think we are making progress towards it, but already there are signs that certainly the journalistic media in this country are buying into the notion of us as a nation, the rainbow nation. Just open up any newspaper and see how many times you can pick up reference to the rainbow nation. Now we've got a ways to go for that to gel together in the way in which its acceptable to us all but back to the pitfalls that I spoke about earlier. I think that we ought to be very careful about how we relate to the rest of our region and our continent so that we don't get into the business of exporting the South African way of life simply because we think it's the only way of life.

PROF MICHAEL MORGAN: You were talking about the fact that media corporations are enormous and they are, but they are also deeply integrated with all the other large corporations. When you look at the boards of directors of the main media corporations, they're also on the board of directors of Coca-Cola and Pepsi Cola and Philip Morris and Proctor and Gamble; and these organizations and the government share common values. They're working in sync. They don't have conflicting ideas about foreign policy. It's not a question of whose leading who, these are reciprocal agendas. It's not that the US wants to occupy other countries. The US wants markets to sell and to trade and these corporations want markets. Foreign policy opens markets and creates more of this flow, this is what suits the media, what suits the corporations and what suits the government. So it's hard to say chicken or egg, which one you put first? I think media would tend to follow the foreign policy more. They don't always buy it 100%. There is a lot of room for opposition. That's the way it works – it manages contradiction, it manages opposition by allowing it, but then filters it in the interest of the corporations, so it's not which one comes first. They are highly consistent.

QUESTION: In reference now to the socialization of society by the media and the media's role within it. What is the role played by movies and especially Hollywood in socializing society?

PROF MICHAEL MORGAN: Movies are not particularly different from television; they're just more expensive. In fact, the vast bulk of profits from films now come from home videos. If I can remember the statistics, fifty years ago 60% of the country went to the movies every week. Back in the 30's, 40's, and 50's, 65 - 70% of the country saw a movie once a week. Now it's about 8% goes once a week. The movie studios are owned by the same companies that own television and most movies lose a lot of money. Most films lose a fortune, but every now and then they produce a blockbuster that pays for everything else. But the movie studios are completely interwoven with publishing, with radio, with television. They are not separated anymore. Films are increasingly made knowing that they are going to make their money when they go on DVD, when they go onto international distribution. When they are showing on cable, it's not the box office anymore. It's not going to the movies but the messages, the values, the production companies – they are all in the

same industry. They just get a little more attention when there is a blockbuster.

QUESTION: Mr Henry in your conclusion you mentioned something about the African media having to tell African stories. From an international point of view, Africa is regarded as a Dark Continent that is associated with corruption, poverty, political instabilities and all those negatives. So if you tell an African story, it means of course that part of that story includes all those things that I have just mentioned.

HENRY JEFFREYS: I don't want to be misunderstood. I'm really not suggesting that we should get into a propaganda process to focus only on the positive. I think you're right that the way in which the international media focuses on Africa tends to focus on those things about people from the Dark Continent. In that phrase alone you can sense this.

The Economist, a British publication that is a highly respected publication around the world, even in the United States, four years ago had a cover story focused on Africa and they called us the lost continent. While I was in Cambridge, we had the Editor of the Economist visit us one day and I asked him that question. I said to him, "How can you write us off just in half a page?" The story was half a page of an editorial, which wrote us off as a people and a place and then had a few pages inside the magazine. He then acknowledged that they went back after that and regretted the terminology because Africa has got a lot more going for it than it gets credit for.

Our problem is that if you go to a newsstand to pick up a magazine to read about your own continent and there is not a single African magazine. There are some magazines that are about Africa but the people who publish them sit in London and they report largely on what African politicians are doing or give politicians pages of space to go on about things important to them.

So I think what we should be doing is to establish newspapers of credibility. We need to establish credible magazines like Time, Newsweek and the Economist that would become sources of information about our continent that others can't ignore. One of my main ambitions is, in fact, to be involved in bringing out an African news magazine that would look and feel a lot like Time and Newsweek but that would report on the woes of this continent, but also on its many achievements.

Did you know that one of the classes I took at Harvard was on the criminal justice system? We did case studies on a number of countries including the United States on what is going well and what is not going well in each criminal justice system.

Did you know that it's estimated that one in three black Americans will spend their lives in jail? You know we have our problems here with our criminal justice system and our foreign correspondents sit in Johannesburg or Cape Town writing about how many of us will spend time in jail. That is played out back to the audiences as a huge dark story out of Africa but you will never read about the dark side of America in the same way. You will never read that in those magazines. So I am just suggesting that I think there is a lot that's positive about Africa. There is a big turnaround since South Africa has moved on to democracy.

Just this year in 2005, there are more democratic elections on this continent than there has ever been before. You don't see those things played out either by the international media or by the African media so I think there is a lot to be told about Africa. Lots of exciting things our sports people are doing all over the world. Soccer teams in Europe can hardly win any games these days without some African being in the line-up, scoring goals.

In the cultural sphere, our artists are main players in New York City, in Los Angeles, in London etc. We need as a media to build a capacity so that things can be

covered accurately to the world so that it can't be ignored when people start making judgments about our continent. It's a huge challenge.

QUESTION: Mr Jeffreys: Are we building a newspaper and a magazine capacity relevant for Africa considering the high levels of poverty? Most people in Africa don't have access or there is not the necessary infrastructure for your Time and Newsweek to be implemented in Africa?

HENRY JEFFREYS: I think you need to develop the platforms across the spectrum. In other words, you need newspapers and publications that will entertain, that will provide insights that will allow information to flow in an open way for decision makers, for a middle class, for poor people. That is quite possible to do.

As we speak, radio is still the most powerful vehicle through which Africans receive information. A huge drawback for us is that radio stations or the broadcasting systems, television and radio, in most parts of the continent are still under government control. But there are initiatives under way under the reformed African Union, the NEPAD process, where South Africa is a key player, in which to move African media, radio stations especially, television stations out of the hands of the state and either privatize them or turn them into public broadcasting systems such as we have done with our own public broadcaster. I think there is quite a dynamic process underway. There is at the moment a process that will allow for us to create these institutions. We just must be very careful that we don't create media for elites only. You have to create media for the full spectrum of society so that people can have more or less equal access to the information that is important to them.

PROF MICHAEL MORGAN: I don't think it is an either/or. I agree it can work in multiple platforms and I was thinking about a group I met with in Johannesburg yesterday called Mindset. I don't know if you have heard about them, but they are raising lots of money from different national and international groups to provide computers and other technology to hospitals, to schools across the continent.

There are 900 schools and I don't know how many health clinics where they are providing programs on education, on health, on programs that are addressing issues of poverty using new technologies. They are providing all the technology and all the programming and it looks like they are doing some really positive things and also working on sustainable development where it is needed.

We need to work on all these tracks at once and I am also struck by the remarkable spread of cell phones around the country in the last couple of years. I think I saw something that said 67% growth last year. While cell phones aren't going to feed people, they are connecting people and providing information. They are providing communication in places that have been cut off so there are hopeful things happening.

QUESTION: Professor Morgan: I found that your paper confirmed for me this very draconian idea that power does not work through cohesive means from above, but rather it actually works through the mechanism of control from every day discourse. I just thought about the phrasing of the term 'the war on terror', the fact that war usually is supposed to mean something between two nation states, that one can identify how it was used in a discourse. One can see that one nation state is the US, but there really is not an identifiable opposing nation state and I was wondering if you could talk about the role of the media in accepting terms like that without some critical discussion.

PROF MICHAEL MORGAN: We have a long history of declaring war on things that are not countries. We had a war on poverty. I don't know if we won that one or not. We had a war on drugs. That one was a terrible failure. So now we have a

war on terror and there has been some fatigue with the term so they came up with a new term a few months ago. It was a horrible phrase that was supposed to replace the war on terror.

These things have their usefulness and they last for a while, sometimes they last for a long time. We still talk about the war on drugs. We don't talk about the war on poverty as much any more, but they are very handy. They are unifying. They encapsulate a particular ideological position and they become part of the discourse. That is the way that generally operates by just setting the terms of discourse.

I have a really long response that shows how some of this worked in the last Gulf War, but certainly the terms are created and people incorporate them as their own and they appropriate them as their own and they just become normal ways of talking about them. The term was, "global struggle against extremist violence", so clunky that it was dropped quickly. War on terror is easier to say.

QUESTION: What I would like both of you to do is to provide a contextual basis to my question. Professor Morgan mentioned earlier on how stories represent the way we see our world and you also indicated that the most critical implications of the role of the media and democracy as focusing on the stories of society, where these implications are really played out.

My question is on fiction. If you look at soapies and the movies that a lot of South Africans watch, you will find a leading white actor starring opposite a leading white actress or a supporting white actor starring opposite a supporting white actress and it is the same scenario here. Is that also representative of, or a reflection of, the political reality of our countries or terms of our development? The US is way ahead of us. We have relatively new terms for this because of our democracy and race relations, so it's more on the media and race relations in relation to context.

PROF MICHAEL MORGAN: I think a lot of it reflects just conventions of story telling and a lot of the production of media content follows formulas, follows conventions to make it very easy for people to watch. If you change the casting, if you change the formula, people get thrown off.

Programs are designed to make it very easy for people to watch so that they will keep watching and they can tune in at any time and know exactly what is going on very quickly. Directors don't like to mess around too much with the established patterns of casting. Not because they are necessarily racist but because it is a production line, it is an assembly line and it is hard to break the mould. That's not to say things do not change. There has been a general increase in representation of African Americans on television but it is a very complicated way in which they are portrayed.

In entertainment, they tend to be very wealthy, upper class. They have servants and they live very fancy lifestyles. In the news, they are drug dealers and criminals and that creates a very interesting dynamic because it gives people the message that we don't have racism anymore in society because clearly black people can make it. Look at all the rich ones on TV but then look at all these drug dealers. It must be their own fault if people do not make it. It's not the system, it's personal lack of ability and that is reflected in the patterns of casting: who is the hero, who is cast as what and sometimes there are changes but they are just done for novelty. You still go back to constant formulas. Does that reflect what you were asking?

HENRY JEFFREYS: I really hope I understood your question. I want to respond to it in two ways. The one is that I never watch or I seldom watch soapies and if I do watch them, it is simply because I am in the room with my family who just can't get enough of these things. Of late, 7de Laan is all the rave in my house and it is



just for me so unreal as a reflection of life as I know it in this country. The way in which the characters act with each other – white versus black etc. It's just not happening out there in the world that I know. But I tell you, it just amazes me how my family gets into this story. So there is an issue there that I think one needs to think about.

QUESTION: My question is directed to both presenters. Professor Morgan alluded to the fact that in order to democratize the media environment we need to privatize it. I agree with you totally, but in a privatized media environment we know that many socially unacceptable kinds of portrayals would obviously mesh like pornography, excessive behavior. Obviously in such an environment state control intervention is very limited. How do you ensure that the moral fabric of the society does not disintegrate and at the same insuring that there is freedom of the media?

PROF MICHAEL MORGAN: I have a couple of responses. We could talk about this question for about three days. Certainly whatever is considered morally acceptable is not static and things that people were incredibly offended by 50 years ago in popular culture or movies or in everyday life, we take for granted now. We wonder what were they concerned about? Why were they upset about that? So standards of what is objectionable or immoral or offensive are constantly shifting and I think they are driven more by society than by the media. I think society sets the level of what it will accept. What is interesting is how our perceptions of these things shift. 15 years ago people around the world were saying that because of American popular culture communism was failing, because they were seeing that people could do what they wanted. They could wear jeans. They could listen to rock 'n roll. They were not constrained by socialist government and they wanted to live like that. The Berlin wall fell, the Soviet Union collapsed and the subsequent revolutions were bloodless. Everybody said American popular culture, rock music, the themes of freedom and consumption, these images and popular culture led to liberation.

Now we are hearing something very different: American popular culture is crude and offensive. It shows things about violence and pornography that are hugely offensive and it is leading people around the world not to seek liberation but to hate America and want to bring it down. That it is a very interesting shift in discourse. I do not know how much the content has changed. I think we are seeing the same popular cultural images then as now but the discourse has changed.

HENRY JEFFREYS: You know we come out of a past where what is morally right used to be decided by a minority within a minority. We then moved on to adopting a liberal and much admired Constitution that is now the supreme law of the land and we all have to respond to that in ways that do not contravene what the Constitution will allow and what it will not allow.

You also probably know that immediately after our society opened up, pornography, previously banned, just flooded the market. We had all sorts of magazines that you could buy, you can still buy them, and there was a huge concern about the moral implications of this on the morality of society. You can see how many of these magazines are still around and how many of them are still making any money because people just adjusted to it. These were denied people in the past and obviously people were curious. Once you saw them, your own value system kicked in and you decided that they were not for you, or your kids and you then started making your own decisions. This is what our new constitutional environment allows us. It allows us to decide what will work for us and what will not work for us and we took government out of our lives and I think that is the way it should be.